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(54) **Ferulic acid decarboxylase**

(57) The present invention relates to a protein having the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1, or a protein having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity and having an amino acid sequence wherein one or more amino acid residues are deleted, substituted or added in the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1; a gene encoding said protein; a recombinant

vector comprising said gene; a transformant carrying said recombinant vector; a process for producing 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin or vanillic acid, or a distilled liquor, wherein an enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from said transformant is used; and a process for producing a distilled liquor, wherein yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity is used.

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Description

BACKGROUND

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a process for producing distilled liquors having an excellent flavor by the use of yeast into which a ferulic acid decarboxylase gene has been introduced.

Ferulic acid decarboxylase is an enzyme which catalyzes the decarboxylation of ferulic acid to form 4-vinylguaiacol.

2. Brief Description of the Background Art

In the liquor industry, it is always desired to develop distilled liquors such as shochu (a Japanese distilled liquor), bai jiu (a Chinese distilled liquor), whiskey, brandy, vodka, rum, gin and the like having an excellent flavor. Distilled liquors possessing an excellent flavor typically have a relatively high content of at least one of 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid.

Vanillin and vanillic acid are formed by oxidation of 4-vinylguaiacol [Nippon Nogeikagaku Kaishi, 70(6), 684-686 (1996)].

It is known that distilled liquors having an excellent flavor can be produced by adding hydroxycinnamic acid ester hydrolase, or a koji mold having a high productivity of hydroxycinnamic acid ester hydrolase, (Japanese Published Unexamined Patent Application No. 115957/95) or ferulic acid esterase [Nippon Nogeikagaku Kaishi, 70(6), 684-686 (1996)] to liberate ferulic acid into moromi.

Ferulic acid, as well as cinnamic acid and coumaric acid, is a kind of phenylacrylic acid, and is bonded in the form of ester to the arabinose side chain of arabinoxylan contained in the hemicellulose fraction which constitutes cell walls of plants such as cereals.

A method for preparing yeast having a high ferulic acid decarboxylase activity by cell fusion has been proposed [Abstracts of the Annual Meeting of the Society of Fermentation and Bioengineering, 41 (1995)]. However, it has not yet been possible to obtain yeast having an increased ferulic acid decarboxylase activity. Accordingly, a method of producing distilled liquors having an excellent flavor by the use of such yeast is not known.

Ferulic acid decarboxylase of *Bacillus pumilus* [Appl. Environ. Microbiol., 61(1), 326-332 (1995)] and that of *Pseudomonas fluorescens* [J. Bacteriol., 176, 5912-5918 (1994)] have already been isolated and purified. The gene encoding ferulic acid decarboxylase (hereinafter referred to as FDC gene) of *B. pumilus* [Appl. Environ. Microbiol., 61, 4484-4486 (1995)] is also known. Ferulic acid decarboxylase of yeast belonging to the genus *Saccharomyces*, etc. has not been isolated, even though the existence of the enzyme activity has been recognized.

As to *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, the gene encoding phenylacrylic acid decarboxylase (hereinafter referred to as PAD1 gene) [Gene, 142, 107-112 (1994)] is known, but there is no report on its FDC gene.

An object of the present invention is to provide ferulic acid decarboxylase which is useful in the production of distilled liquors having an excellent flavor.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a protein having the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1, or a protein having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity and having an amino acid sequence wherein one or more amino acid residues are deleted, substituted or added in the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1 (hereinafter referred to as the protein of the present invention); a gene encoding said protein (hereinafter referred to as the gene of the present invention); a recombinant vector comprising said gene (hereinafter referred to as the recombinant vector of the present invention); a transformant carrying said recombinant vector (hereinafter referred to as the transformant of the present invention); a process for producing 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid, which comprises bringing ferulic acid into contact with an enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from said transformant in an aqueous medium to form 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid in the aqueous medium, and recovering 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid therefrom (hereinafter referred to as the process for producing 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid of the present invention); a process for producing a distilled liquor, which comprises adding an enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from said transformant to moromi (hereinafter referred to as the process for producing a distilled liquor by using the protein of the present invention); and a process for producing a distilled liquor, which is characterized in that yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity is used (hereinafter referred to as the process for producing a distilled liquor by using the yeast of the present invention).

The present invention provides a distilled liquor produced by the above-mentioned processes for producing a

distilled liquor.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 shows the restriction map of the DNA fragment containing *Saccharomyces* FDC1 gene and the result of the subcloning carried out for the determination of FDC1 gene as well as the FDC activity of the obtained DNA fragments. Fig. 2 illustrates the steps for constructing the plasmid for the expression of FDC1 gene of Fig. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The protein of the present invention can be a protein having an amino acid sequence wherein amino acid residues are deleted, substituted or added in the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1 so long as it has ferulic acid decarboxylase activity, i.e. the activity of catalyzing decarboxylation of ferulic acid to form 4-vinylguaiacol. The number of amino acid residues which are deleted, substituted or added is not specifically limited, but as is well-known to those of ordinary skill in the art, is normally within the range of one to several tens, preferably one to ten or fewer. Preferred amino acid sequences are those showing 20% or more homology, particularly 40% or more homology to the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1 on simple homology analysis on the entire sequence using DNASIS version 3.0 (Hitachi Software Engineering Co., Ltd.).

Isolation of the gene of the present invention, determination of the nucleotide sequence of said gene, preparation of the recombinant vector of the present invention and the transformant carrying the recombinant vector of the present invention, and production of the protein of the present invention can be carried out given the information provided herein by those of ordinary skill in this art using basic techniques for genetic engineering and biological engineering according to the descriptions in commercially available experiment manuals, e.g. Gene Manual, Kodansha Co., Ltd.; Methods for Experiments in Gene Manipulation, edited by Yasutaka Takagi, Kodansha Co., Ltd.; Molecular Cloning, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (1982); Molecular Cloning, 2nd ed., Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (1989); Methods in Enzymol., 194 (1991); and Gene Experiments Using Yeasts, published by Yodosha Co., Ltd., Japan (1994).

The gene of the present invention conferring ferulic acid decarboxylase activity can be isolated using yeast having no ferulic acid decarboxylase activity or yeast having a very low ferulic acid decarboxylase activity (hereinafter collectively referred to as yeast having substantially no ferulic acid decarboxylase activity), e.g. *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* K9H14 (hereinafter referred to as K9H14 strain). That is, the FDC gene can be isolated by transforming K9H14 strain with the DNA library of the yeast carrying FDC gene, and obtaining DNA from transformed yeast conferred with ferulic acid decarboxylase activity.

The DNA library of the yeast carrying FDC gene can be prepared by cleaving the chromosomal DNA of yeast having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity, e.g. *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* W3 (hereinafter referred to as W3 strain), which is wine yeast, with a restriction enzyme, and ligating each of the obtained DNA fragments with a vector capable of being maintained in yeast.

Any restriction enzymes which can cleave the chromosomal DNA can be used in the above process. Preferably, those which give DNA fragments of 10 Kbp or less are used. The chromosomal DNA may be completely digested or partially digested with the restriction enzyme.

Examples of the vectors capable of being maintained in yeast are YCp vectors, YEp vectors, YRp vectors, Ylp vectors, and YAC (yeast artificial chromosome) vectors.

The transformation of K9H14 strain with the DNA library can be carried out according to the methods generally used in genetic engineering and biological engineering such as the spheroplast method [e.g. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA, 75, 1929-1933 (1978)], the lithium acetate method [e.g. J. Bacteriol., 153, 163-168 (1983)], and the electroporation method [e.g. Methods in Enzymol., 194, 182-187 (1991)].

The yeast conferred with ferulic acid decarboxylase activity can be selected, for example, in the following manner.

The transformants obtained by the above process are cultured overnight (20-24 hours) in YPD liquid medium (1% yeast extract, 2% peptone, and 2% glucose). To 0.9 ml of each of the resulting cultures is added 0.1 ml of 1 g/l ferulic acid solution, followed by culturing for 20-24 hours. After the completion of culturing, the cultures having a smoky smell are selected organoleptically, followed by high performance liquid chromatography [Nippon Nogeikagaku Kaishi, 69, 1587-1596 (1995)] to further select the cultures from which 4-vinylguaiacol can be detected. Transformants are isolated from the thus selected cultures, whereby the yeasts conferred with ferulic acid decarboxylase activity are selected.

As the ferulic acid, either trans-ferulic acid or cis-ferulic acid may be used. However, trans-ferulic acid is preferably used.

Recovery of a plasmid from the yeast conferred with ferulic acid decarboxylase activity and transformation of *Escherichia coli* using the plasmid can be carried out according to the methods generally used in genetic engineering. For example, the plasmid can be recovered from the yeast by the method described in Gene Experiments Using Yeasts (an extra number of Experimental Medicine), Yodosha Co., Ltd. (1994), and the transformation can be carried out by

the method described in Molecular Cloning, 2nd ed., Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (1989).

The DNA clone selected by the above method is cleaved with appropriate restriction enzymes and the obtained DNA fragments are subjected to nucleotide sequence analysis by using the dideoxy method, etc., whereby the nucleotide sequence of FDC gene can be determined. The nucleotide sequence of FDC gene derived from W3 strain can be obtained from the result of the yeast genome project [e.g. Internet <http://genome-www.stanford.edu/sacchdb/>].

An example of the nucleotide sequence of FDC gene determined in such manner is the sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1.

Once it is established that the nucleotide sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1 encodes ferulic acid decarboxylase, the gene of the present invention can be obtained by chemical synthesis, PCR (polymerase chain reaction), or hybridization using a DNA fragment having said nucleotide sequence as a probe.

The gene of the present invention includes modified genes obtained by artificial deletion, substitution or addition of a part of the nucleotide sequence of the gene prepared by the above-described method. Selection of a codon for each amino acid can be made on arbitrary basis, for example, by referring to the codon usage of a host to be employed [e.g. Nucleic Acids Res., 9, 43-74 (1981)].

It is preferred to appropriately substitute bases in the nucleotide sequence of the gene of the present invention used for the preparation of the recombinant vector, so as to give the codons most suitable for the expression of the gene in a host cell. Modification of the nucleotide sequence can also be carried out according to the methods such as site-specific mutagenesis [e.g. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA, 81, 5662-5666 (1984)].

Gene disruption, regulation of expression, and alteration of expression level can be effected on the gene of the present invention by using, for example, the methods described in Methods in Enzymol., 194, 594-597 (1991).

The recombinant vector of the present invention can be obtained by preparing a DNA fragment comprising the gene of the present invention by using restriction enzymes, etc., and inserting the DNA fragment into an expression vector at an insertion site located downstream of the promoter therein. The transformant of the present invention can be obtained by introducing the recombinant vector of the present invention into a host cell suited to the above-mentioned expression vector.

In the recombinant vector of the present invention, the transcription termination sequence is not essential for the expression of the gene of the present invention, but it is preferred that the transcription termination sequence be located immediately downstream of the structural gene.

As the host cells, any cells capable of expressing the above gene can be used. Examples of suitable host cells are cells of bacteria belonging to the genus Escherichia, Serratia, Corynebacterium, Brevibacterium, Pseudomonas, or Bacillus (e.g. Escherichia coli, Bacillus subtilis, Bacillus amyloliquefaciens, Brevibacterium flavum, Brevibacterium lactofermentum, Corynebacterium glutamicum, and Microbacterium ammoniaphilum), cells of yeasts such as Saccharomyces cerevisiae, Schizosaccharomyces pombe, Kluyveromyces lactis, Trichosporon pullulans, and Schwanniomyces alluvius, animal cells such as Namalwa cell, COS cell and CHO cell, and plant cells such as tobacco cell and carrot cell.

As the expression vector, vectors capable of autonomous replication or integration into chromosome in the above cells and comprising a promoter at a site appropriate for the transcription of the nucleotide sequence of the gene of the present invention are used.

When bacterial cells such as E. coli are used as the host cells, it is preferred to use the recombinant vector of the present invention which is capable of autonomous replication in the cells used and which comprises a promoter, a ribosome binding sequence, the DNA of the present invention, and a transcription termination sequence. The vector may further comprise a gene regulating the promoter.

Examples of suitable expression vectors are pBTrp2, pBTac1 and pBTac2 (products of Boehringer Mannheim), pKYP200 [Agric. Biol. Chem., 48, 669-675 (1984)], pLSA1 [Agric. Biol. Chem., 53, 277 (1989)], pGEL1 [Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA, 82, 4306 (1985)], and pBluescript (product of Stratagene).

As the promoter, any promoters capable of expression in host cells such as E. coli can be used. For example, promoters derived from E. coli or phage, such as trp promoter (P_{trp}), lac promoter (P_{lac}), P_L promoter, and P_R promoter, may be used. Artificially modified promoters such as a promoter in which two P_{trp}s are combined in tandem (P_{trp} x 2) and lac promoter can also be used.

As the ribosome binding sequence, any ribosome binding sequences capable of expression in host cells such as E. coli can be used. It is preferred to adjust the distance between the ribosome binding sequence and the initiation codon to appropriate length (e.g. 6-18 bases).

Introduction of the recombinant vector into bacterial cells can be carried out by any of the methods for introducing DNA into bacterial cells, for example, the method using calcium ion [Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA, 69, 2110-2114 (1972)] and the protoplast method (Japanese Published Unexamined Patent Application No. 2483942/88).

When yeast cells are used as the host cells, YEp13 (ATCC 37115), YEp24 (ATCC 37051), YCp50 (ATCC 37419), etc. can be used as the expression vector.

As the promoter, any promoters capable of expression in yeast cells can be used. Examples of suitable promoters

are promoters of genes in the glycolytic pathway such as hexose kinase, gal 1 promoter, gal 10 promoter, heat shock protein promoter, MF α 1 promoter, and CUP 1 promoter.

Introduction of the recombinant vector into yeast cells can be carried out by any of the methods for introducing DNA into yeast cells, for example, the electroporation method [Methods in Enzymol., 194, 182-187 (1990)], the spheroplast method [Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA, 84, 1929-1933 (1978)], and the lithium acetate method [J. Bacteriol., 153, 163-168 (1983)].

When animal cells are used as the host cells, pcDNA1/Amp, pcDNA1 and pcDM8 (products of Funakoshi Co., Japan), etc. can be used as the expression vector. As the promoter, any promoters capable of expression in animal cells can be used. An example of a suitable promoter is the promoter of IE (immediate early) gene of human CMV. The enhancer of IE gene of human CMV may be used in combination with the promoter.

Introduction of the recombinant vector into animal cells can be carried out by any of the methods for introducing DNA into animal cells, for example, the electroporation method [Cytotechnology, 3, 133 (1990)], the calcium phosphate method (Japanese Published Unexamined Patent Application No. 227075/90), and the lipofection method [Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA, 84, 7413 (1987)].

When plant cells are used as the host cells, pBI121 [Nucleic Acids Res., 12, 8771-8721 (1984)], etc. can be used as the expression vector. As the promoter, any promoters capable of expression in plant cells can be used. An example of a suitable promoter is 35S promoter of cauliflower mosaic virus.

Introduction of the recombinant vector into plant cells can be carried out by any of the methods for introducing DNA into plant cells, for example, the *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* method [Methods in Enzymol., 118, 627-640 (1986)], the particle bombardment method [Plant Molecular Biology, 11, 433-439 (1989)], and the protoplast method [Nature, 319, 791-793 (1986)].

The transformant of the present invention is used for the production of the protein of the present invention and the production of flavors such as 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin and vanillic acid. Further, the transformant of the present invention prepared by using yeast cells as the host cells is preferably used for the production of distilled liquors having an excellent flavor.

The protein of the present invention can be produced by culturing the transformant of the present invention in a medium, allowing the protein of the present invention to accumulate in the culture, and recovering the protein from the culture. Culturing of the transformant of the present invention can be carried out by conventional methods for culturing the host cells of the transformant.

For the culturing of the transformant prepared by using microbial cells such as *E. coli* cells and yeast cells as the host cells, either a natural medium or a synthetic medium may be used insofar as it is a medium suitable for efficient culturing of the transformant which contains carbon sources, nitrogen sources, inorganic salts, etc. which can be assimilated by the microorganism used.

Examples of the carbon sources for microbial cells include carbohydrates such as glucose, fructose, sucrose, molasses, starch and starch hydrolyzate; organic acids such as acetic acid and propionic acid; and alcohols such as ethanol and propanol.

As the nitrogen sources for microbial cells, ammonia, ammonium salts of inorganic or organic acids such as ammonium chloride, ammonium sulfate, ammonium acetate and ammonium phosphate, and other nitrogen-containing compounds can be used as well as peptone, meat extract, yeast extract, corn steep liquor, casein hydrolyzate, soybean cake, soybean cake hydrolyzate, and various fermented cells and digested products thereof.

Examples of the inorganic substances for microbial cells include potassium monohydrogenphosphate, potassium dihydrogenphosphate, magnesium phosphate, magnesium sulfate, sodium chloride, ferrous sulfate, manganese sulfate, copper sulfate and calcium carbonate.

Culturing of transformed microbial cells is usually carried out under aerobic conditions, for example, by shaking culture or submerged aeration stirring culture, at 15-40°C for 16-96 hours. The pH is maintained at 3.0-9.0 during the culturing. If necessary, antibiotics such as ampicillin and tetracycline may be added to the medium.

When a microorganism transformed with an expression vector comprising an inducible promoter is cultured, an inducer may be added to the medium, if necessary. For example, in the case of a microorganism transformed with an expression vector comprising *lac* promoter, isopropyl- β -D-thiogalactopyranoside (IPTG) or the like may be added to the medium; and in the case of a microorganism transformed with an expression vector comprising *trp* promoter, indoleacrylic acid (IAA) or the like may be added.

For the culturing of the transformant prepared by using animal cells as the host cells, either a natural medium or a synthetic medium may be used insofar as it is a medium suitable for efficient culturing of the transformant which contains carbon sources, nitrogen sources, inorganic salts, etc. which can be assimilated by the animal cells. Examples of suitable media are RPMI 1640 medium, Eagle's MEM medium, and media prepared by adding fetal calf serum, etc. to these media.

Culturing of microbial cells is usually carried out in the presence of 5% CO₂ at 35-37°C for 3-7 days. If necessary, antibiotics such as kanamycin and penicillin may be added to the medium.

For the culturing of the transformant prepared by using plant cells as the host cells, either a natural medium or a synthetic medium may be used insofar as it is a medium suitable for efficient culturing of the transformant which contains carbon sources, nitrogen sources, inorganic salts, etc. which can be assimilated by the plant cells. Examples of suitable media are Murashige-Skoog (MS) medium and White medium.

Culturing of plant cells is usually carried out under aerobic conditions, for example, by shaking culture or submerged aeration stirring culture, at 15-40°C for 1-30 days. The pH is maintained at 3.0-9.0 during the culturing. If necessary, antibiotics such as kanamycin and penicillin may be added to the medium.

After the completion of culturing, the protein of the present invention produced inside or outside the cells of the transformant of the present invention can be isolated and purified according to ordinary methods for the isolation and purification of enzymes. When the protein is intracellularly produced, the isolation and purification can be carried out in the following manner. The cells are separated from the culture by centrifugation and washed, followed by disruption using an ultrasonic disruptor, a French press, a Manton Gaulin homogenizer, a Dyno Mill, etc. to obtain a cell-free extract. The cell-free extract is centrifuged, and the obtained supernatant is subjected to salting-out with ammonium sulfate, etc., anion exchange chromatography using diethylaminoethyl (DEAE)-Sephacrose, etc., hydrophobic chromatography using butyl Sepharose, phenyl Sepharose, etc., gel filtration using a molecular sieve, electrophoresis such as isoelectric focusing, etc., whereby a purified enzyme preparation of the protein of the present invention is obtained. When the protein is extracellularly produced, the culture is treated in the same manner as in the above treatment of the cell-free extract to obtain a purified enzyme preparation of the protein of the present invention.

The enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from the transformant of the present invention to be used in the process for producing 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid of the present invention includes the partially or highly purified protein of the present invention obtained by the above-described method, as well as culture, cells and treated cells of the transformant of the present invention. Examples of the treated cells include cells which are physicochemically or biochemically treated such as washed cells, lyophilized cells and acetone-treated cells.

The enzyme source is usually used at a concentration of 0.1-1000 units ferulic acid decarboxylase/ml aqueous medium. The amount of ferulic acid decarboxylase is expressed in terms of a unit, one unit being defined as that amount of the enzyme which produces 1 nmol of 4-vinylguaiacol by the reaction using ferulic acid as the substrate in 50 mM phosphate buffer (pH 5.0) at 30°C for one hour. Ferulic acid is usually used at a concentration of 0.01-10 g/l in an aqueous medium.

When the culture or cells are used as the enzyme source, the culture or cell suspension may be treated with a surfactant such as cetylpyridinium chloride or cetyltrimethylammonium bromide, or an organic solvent such as toluene or xylene. The surfactant or organic solvent is added in an amount of 0.05-1.0% (w/v) or 1-20% (v/v), respectively.

The reaction is usually carried out at 20-60°C at pH 2.5-10.0 for 1-72 hours, though these conditions are varied according to the amount of culture, cells or treated cells and the amount of ferulic acid.

By the above reaction, 4-vinylguaiacol is formed in the aqueous medium. After the completion of reaction, the culture, cells, treated cells, etc. are disrupted, if necessary. Then, the precipitate is removed from the aqueous medium by means such as centrifugation, and the obtained supernatant is subjected to ordinary purification steps such as extraction, distillation, various kinds of chromatography, and recrystallization, whereby 4-vinylguaiacol can be isolated and purified.

Vanillin or vanillic acid can be obtained by oxidizing 4-vinylguaiacol in the aqueous medium, or 4-vinylguaiacol can be isolated and purified from the aqueous medium by means such as forced aeration or by the use of cells of microorganisms such as *Bacillus subtilis* and *Corynebacterium glutanicum* [J. Ind. Microbiol., 15, 457-471 (1995)].

Isolation and purification of vanillin or vanillic acid can be carried out in the same manner as in the isolation and purification of 4-vinylguaiacol.

According to the process for producing a distilled liquor by using the protein of the present invention, a distilled liquor can be obtained in the same manner as in a conventional process for producing a distilled liquor which comprises saccharification of a carbon source with a koji mold or a sacchariferous enzyme, alcohol fermentation caused by addition of yeast, and distillation, except that the enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from the transformant of the present invention is added to moromi at a concentration of 0.1-50 units/ml as the amount of ferulic acid decarboxylase. The moromi means a culture obtained through alcohol fermentation. The distilled liquor means an alcoholic liquor obtained by distillation of the moromi as such, or the moromi after treatment with the pressure filtration or centrifugation.

According to the process for producing a distilled liquor by using the yeast of the present invention, a distilled liquor can be obtained in the same manner as in a conventional process for producing a distilled liquor which comprises saccharification of a carbon source with a koji mold or a sacchariferous enzyme, alcohol fermentation caused by addition of yeast, and distillation, except that yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity is used.

The term "yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity" means yeast which is obtained through recombinant DNA techniques or mutation techniques using a yeast strain as host cells or parent strain and which has

ferulic acid decarboxylase activity higher than that of the yeast strain used as the host cells or parent strain.

For example, the yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity can be prepared by recombinant DNA techniques in the following manner. A recombinant vector comprising a gene encoding ferulic acid decarboxylase (e.g. the gene of the present invention, and FDC gene of *Bacillus pumilus*) is prepared by the above method, and host cells are transformed with the recombinant vector by the above method, whereby the desired yeast can be obtained.

The yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity can also be prepared by mutation techniques in the following manner. A parent strain is subjected to mutation treatment by conventional methods, for example, ultraviolet irradiation and treatment with mutagens such as ethyl methanesulfonate and N-methyl-N'-nitro-N-nitrosoguanidine. From the obtained mutants is selected a strain having an enhanced 4-vinylguaiacol productivity compared with the parent strain by the same method as in the above-described selection of the yeast conferred with ferulic acid decarboxylase activity, whereby the desired yeast can be obtained. Further, the yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity can be efficiently produced by culturing the mutants obtained as above on a medium containing phenylacrylic acid at such a concentration that the parent strain cannot grow sufficiently, for example, a medium containing 1 mM or more ferulic acid, and then selecting a mutant which shows significant growth compared with the parent strain.

Any yeast which is suitable for use in the production of distilled liquors can be used as the host cells or parent strain for preparing the yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity. Preferably, yeasts belonging to the genus *Saccharomyces* are used, and more preferably, those belonging to *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* are used. In particular, the use of yeasts belonging to *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* which have substantially no ferulic acid decarboxylase activity, e.g. yeast No. 7 of Japan Brewing Association, yeast No. 9 of Japan Brewing Association and K9H14 strain (sake and shochu yeasts), and IFO2112, IFO2114 and IFO2115 (whiskey yeasts), as the host cells gives a remarkable effect.

The yeast of the present invention can be prepared using yeast having substantially no ferulic acid decarboxylase activity as the host cells in the following manner. Transformants are prepared by the method similar to that for preparing the transformant of the present invention, and ferulic acid is added thereto as the substrate. Detection of 4-vinylguaiacol is carried out organoleptically, or quantitatively by means of high performance liquid chromatography, etc. to select the strains with which the formation of 4-vinylguaiacol is confirmed, whereby the desired yeast can be obtained.

An example of the yeast of the present invention prepared by the above method is *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* YSA7 (hereinafter referred to as YSA7 strain). This strain was deposited with the National Institute of Bioscience and Human-Technology, Agency of Industrial Science and Technology, Ministry of International Trade and Industry (1-3, Higashi 1-chome, Tsukuba-shi, Ibaraki-ken, Japan) on December 11, 1996 with accession number FERM BP-5772 under the Budapest Treaty.

The following Test Example shows that YSA7 strain is yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity.

Test Example 1 Ferulic acid decarboxylase activity test

The test was carried out on YSA7 strain, K9H14 strain (parent strain of YSA7 strain), and K9H14-C strain (transformant prepared by introducing YEp24 into K9H14 strain). One loopful of each strain was inoculated into 10 ml of YPD medium in a test tube, and cultured with shaking at 30°C for 22 hours. To 0.9 ml of the resulting culture was added 0.1 ml of 1 g/l ferulic acid solution, followed by static culture at 25°C for 22 hours. After the completion of culturing, the 4-vinylguaiacol content of the culture supernatant was determined by high performance liquid chromatography under the following conditions.

Column: Wakosil 5C 18-200 (i.d. 4.6 x 250 mm)

Column temperature: 50°C

Mobile phase: 10 mM phosphate buffer (pH 2.5)/methanol = 50/50 (v/v)

Detector: Fluorescence detector (Ex 280 nm, Em 320 nm)

Sample: The culture supernatant was diluted 10-fold with the mobile phase and 10 µl of the dilution was put into the column.

The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Strain	Amount of 4-vinylguaiacol formed (ppm)
YSA7 strain	4.88
K9H14 strain	Trace

Table 1 (continued)

Strain	Amount of 4-vinylguaiacol formed (ppm)
K9H14-C strain	Trace

The process for producing a distilled liquor of the present invention using the yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is prepared by the above method is described below.

As the carbon source, any non-fibrous carbohydrates and starch can be used. Preferred carbon sources are cereals such as rice, barley, foxtail millet, corn, kaoliang, Japanese millet and millet, potatoes, buckwheat, fruits such as grapes and apples, and koji thereof. Particularly preferred are cereals and koji thereof.

As the koji mold, filamentous fungi used for preparing rice koji, barley koji, bran koji, etc., e.g. microorganisms belonging to the genus Aspergillus or Rhizopus may be used. The koji means carbon sources molded with the above-mentioned koji mold.

As the sacchariferous enzyme, enzymes contained in malt, enzymes produced by koji mold, enzyme preparations such as α -amylase, gluco amylase and protease, etc. may be used.

Alcohol fermentation can be carried out, for example, in the following manner. When cereals are used, fermentation is carried out by parallel complex fermentation in which the cereals, which are starch, are decomposed to saccharides with a sacchariferous enzyme and then the yeast is added to cause fermentation. For example, in the production of shochu, the materials are generally added stepwise by first addition and second addition; that is, koji is added at the start of fermentation, and in the course of fermentation, the remaining part of the carbon source is added. For the production of whiskey, a method is generally employed in which malt is saccharified by addition of warm water and the obtained mash is fermented. When non-fibrous carbohydrates such as fruits, molasses and glucose are used, fermentation is carried out by single fermentation in which the yeast is directly added to the carbon source to cause fermentation.

Usually, the alcohol fermentation is carried out at pH 3.5-5.0 at a temperature of 5-25°C, and the fermentation period after the addition of materials is 7-14 days for shochu, 3-4 days for whiskey, and 7-14 days for brandy.

After the completion of alcohol fermentation, if necessary, the obtained moromi is subjected to pressure filtration or centrifugation to remove the fermentation residue and the yeast cells. The moromi as such or the resulting filtrate or supernatant is distilled to raise the ethanol concentration, whereby a raw liquor is obtained. Alternatively, alcohol may be added to the moromi before pressure filtration or centrifugation to obtain a raw liquor. The raw liquor is directly, or after treatment such as blending, dilution, and addition of alcohol, made into the form of an alcoholic beverage.

Certain embodiments of the invention are illustrated in the following Examples.

Example 1 Cloning of the gene encoding ferulic acid decarboxylase

(1) Conferment of *ura3* mutation on K9H14 strain

K9H14 strain, which is a monoploid strain of Saccharomyces cerevisiae No. 9 of Japan Brewing Association [a sake (shochu) yeast of Japan Brewing Association] and which has substantially no ferulic acid decarboxylase activity, was conferred with *ura3* mutation as a marker for introducing a plasmid according to the method of Boeke, et al. [Mol. Gen. Genet., 197, 345-346 (1984)]. That is, one loopful of K9H14 strain was inoculated into YPD medium and cultured overnight at 30°C with shaking. The resulting culture (100 μ l) was smeared on FOA plate [0.67% Yeast Nitrogen Base w/o Amino Acid (Difco Laboratories Inc.), 0.1% 5-fluoroorotic acid, 0.005% uracil, 2% glucose, and 2% agar], and cultured at 30°C for 3 days. From the colonies formed by the culturing was selected a strain having uracil-requirement which is complemented by transformation with plasmid YCp50 carrying URA3 as a marker, and having no ferulic acid decarboxylase activity. This strain was designated K9H14-3u strain. K9H14-3u strain was equal to K9H14 strain in properties such as fermentability.

(2) Cloning

The chromosomal DNA of W3 strain (wine yeast) was partially digested with BamHI, and the obtained DNA fragments were inserted into the BamHI site of plasmid YCp50 to prepare the gene library. K9H14-3u strain was transformed with the gene library, followed by selection of non-uracil-requiring transformants. The obtained transformants were cultured overnight in YPD liquid medium at 30°C with shaking. To 0.9 ml of each of the resulting cultures was added 0.1 ml of 1 g/l ferulic acid solution, followed by static culture at 25°C for 22 hours. After the completion of culturing, the cultures having a strong smoky smell were selected organoleptically, and the culture supernatants were subjected to high performance liquid chromatography, whereby the formation of 4-vinylguaiacol was confirmed.

A strain obtained from one of the thus selected cultures was isolated as a strain conferred with ferulic acid decarboxylase activity. From this strain was extracted recombinant plasmid pSA11.

Plasmid pSA11 carried an inserted BamHI-BamHI fragment of about 4 kbp. This plasmid was cleaved with various restriction enzymes and the obtained DNA fragments were separated by electrophoresis, followed by measurement of molecular weights, to prepare the restriction map as shown in Fig. 1.

(3) Determination of nucleotide sequence

The nucleotide sequence of the 4 kbp BamHI-BamHI DNA fragment inserted into plasmid pSA11 was determined by the dideoxy method using a DNA sequencer (Pharmacia LKB, ALF DNA Sequencer II). As a result, the nucleotide sequence shown by SEQ ID NO: 2 which comprises the gene having the nucleotide sequence shown by SEQ ID NO: 1 (hereinafter referred to as FDC1 gene) as the open reading frame was determined. The protein encoded by FDC1 gene which is presumed from the determined nucleotide sequence consists of 503 amino acid residues. This nucleotide sequence shown by SEQ ID NO: 1 was found to be identical with the sequence located at 1512140-1513651 on the sequence of chromosome No. IV among the nucleotide sequences published by the yeast genome project [e.g. Internet <http://genome-www.stanford.edu/sacchdb/>]. Simple homology analysis was made on FDC1 gene, FDC gene of *Bacillus pumilus* [Appl. Environ. Microbiol., 61, 4484-4486 (1995)] and the gene encoding phenylacrylic acid decarboxylase of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (hereinafter referred to as PAD1 gene) [Gene, 142, 107-112 (1994)] using DNASIS ver 3.0 (Hitachi Software Engineering Co., Ltd.). As a result, FDC1 gene showed only 30% and 41% homology to the above two genes, respectively, with respect to the entire nucleotide sequence, and only 11.25% and 10.37% homology with respect to the entire amino acid sequence translated from the nucleotide sequence. Further, homology search by BLAST method [e.g. Utilization of Data Base on Genome Net, Kyoritsu Shuppan Co., Ltd. (1996)] revealed that FDC1 gene did not show significant homology to either of FDC gene of *Bacillus pumilus* and PAD1 gene.

Example 2 Preparation of shochu yeast conferred with ferulic acid decarboxylase activity

(1) Construction of plasmid for FDC1 gene expression

About 5 µg of pSA11 plasmid DNA was dissolved in 20 µl of H buffer [50 mM Tris hydrochloride buffer (pH 7.5), 10 mM magnesium chloride, 1 mM dithiothreitol, and 100 mM sodium chloride], and 10 units each of restriction enzymes BamHI and Sall were added thereto. Reaction was carried out overnight at 37°C, followed by separation of the reaction product by 0.8% agarose gel electrophoresis. The segment of the gel containing the band of the DNA fragment of about 3.6 kbp was cut out, and the fragment was extracted and purified by using GENECLAN II Kit (Bio 101 Co., Ltd.). The same procedure as above was repeated except that yeast *E. coli* shuttle vector YEp24 was used in place of plasmid pSA11, whereby a DNA fragment of about 7.7 kbp was extracted and purified. The DNA fragment of about 3.6 kbp derived from plasmid pSA11 (1 µg) and the DNA fragment of about 7.7 kbp derived from YEp24 (0.1 µg) were subjected to ligation reaction overnight at 16°C using Ligation Kit (Takara Shuzo Co., Ltd.). The reaction mixture (5 µl) was used for transformation of competent *E. coli* JM109 strain (Toyobo Co., Ltd.). The obtained transformants were smeared on ampicillin LB agar medium [1% Bacto-tryptone (Difco Laboratories Inc.), 0.5% yeast extract, 1% sodium chloride, 1.5% agar, and 50 µg/ml ampicillin] and cultured at 37°C for 20 hours. After the completion of culturing, the formed colonies were isolated and cultured, and plasmid DNAs were extracted and purified from the cultures. The obtained plasmids were cleaved with restriction enzymes BamHI and Sall, and one of them was found to have the DNA fragment of about 3.6 kbp and was designated expression plasmid pSA8 (Fig. 2).

(2) Introduction of FDC1 gene into shochu yeast and its expression

K9H14-3u strain was inoculated into 100 ml of YPD medium in an Erlenmeyer flask, and cultured with shaking at 30°C until the cell density reached $2-4 \times 10^7$ cells/ml. After the completion of culturing, the cells were collected by centrifugation (2500 rpm, 5 minutes) and then brought into contact with plasmid pSA8 by the lithium acetate method. K9H14-3u strain contacted with plasmid pSA8 was inoculated on SD agar medium (0.67% Yeast Nitrogen Base w/o Amino Acid, 2% glucose, and 2% agar), and cultured at 30°C for 2-5 days. After the completion of culturing, YSA7 strain was obtained from one of the formed colonies as a transformant in which the uracil-requirement of K9H14-3u strain was complemented.

YSA7 strain, K9H14 strain and K9H14-C strain were respectively inoculated into YPD medium, and cultured overnight at 30°C. To 0.9 ml of each of the resulting cultures was added 0.1 ml of 1 g/l ferulic acid solution, followed by static culture at 25°C for 22 hours. After the completion of culturing, the 4-vinylguaiacol content of the culture supernatant was determined by high performance liquid chromatography. The formation of 4-vinylguaiacol was confirmed in the culture of YSA7 strain, whereas the formation of 4-vinylguaiacol was little observed in the cultures of K9H14

strain and K9H14-C strain.

Example 3 Production of rice shochu

Rice shochu was produced by small scale brewing using YSA7 strain, K9H14 strain and K9H14-C strain, and 840 g of total rice. The proportion of raw materials is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

	1st addition	2nd addition	Total
Total rice (g)	280	560	840
Steamed rice (g)	280	-	280
Rice koji (g)	-	560	560
Water (ml)	400	800	1200

After the second addition of the materials, alcohol fermentation was carried out at 20°C for 10 days, and the resulting moromi was distilled to obtain rice shochu.

The produced shochu was analyzed according to the official analytical methods of the National Tax Administration Agency of Japan. The ethanol content and the 4-vinylguaiacol content of each shochu obtained were determined by high performance liquid chromatography, and sensory evaluation was made by 7 panelists.

The results are shown in Table 3. The results of the sensory evaluation are expressed by the average points of the 7 panelists.

Table 3

	YSA7 strain	K9H14 strain	K9H14-C strain
Ethanol (%)	34.6	34.6	34.6
4VG (ppm)	2.0	0.8	0.8
Sensory evaluation*	2.5	3.0	3.0

*Evaluation in 5 points (1: good, 5: bad)

As shown in Table 3, rice shochu produced using YSA7 strain had a significantly higher 4-vinylguaiacol content as compared with that produced using its parent strain, K9H14 strain, and was also found to have a characteristic flavor by the sensory evaluation.

Annex to the description

Sequence Listing

(1) GENERAL INFORMATION:

(i) APPLICANT:

(A) NAME: Kyowa Hakko Kogyo Co. Ltd.

(B) STREET: 1-6-1, Ohtemachi

(C) CITY: Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo

(E) CONTRY: Japan

(F) POSTAL CODE (ZIP): 100-8185

(G) TELEPHONE: 03 3282-0036

(H) TELEFAX: 03 3282-1527

(I) TELEX: J24543HKKYOWA

(ii) TITLE OF INVENTION: FERULIC ACID DECARBOXYLASE

(iii) NUMBER OF SEQUENCES: 002

(iv) COMPUTER READABLE FORM:

(A) MEDIUM TYPE: Diskette - 3.50 inch, 720 Kb storage.

(B) COMPUTER: IBM PS/V

(C) OPERATING SYSTEM: MS-DOS Ver3.30

(D) SOFTWARE: PATENT AID Ver1.0

(v) PRIOR APPLICATION DATA:

(A) APPLICATION NUMBER: JP025026/97

(B) FILING DATE: 7-FEBRUARY-1997

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 1:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

(A) LENGTH: 1512 bases

(B) TYPE: nucleic acid

(C) STRANDEDNESS: single

(D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(ii)MOLECULE TYPE: Genomic DNA

(vi)ORIGINAL SOURCE:

(A)ORGANISM: *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*

(B)STRAIN: YSA7

(ix)FEATURE:

(A)NAME/KEY: CDS

(B)LOCATION: 1 to 1512

(C)IDENTIFICATION METHOD: E

(xi)SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 1

20	ATG AGG AAG CTA AAT CCA GCT TTA GAA TTT AGA GAC TTT ATC CAG GTC	48
	Met Arg Lys Leu Asn Pro Ala Leu Glu Phe Arg Asp Phe Ile Gln Val	
	1 5 10 15	
25	TTA AAA GAT GAA GAT GAC TTA ATC GAA ATT ACC GAA GAG ATT GAT CCA	96
	Leu Lys Asp Glu Asp Asp Leu Ile Glu Ile Thr Glu Glu Ile Asp Pro	
	20 25 30	
30	AAT CTC GAA GTA GGT GCA ATT ATG AGG AAG GCC TAT GAA TCC CAC TTA	144
	Asn Leu Glu Val Gly Ala Ile Met Arg Lys Ala Tyr Glu Ser His Leu	
	35 40 45	
35	CCA GCC CCG TTA TTT AAA AAT CTC AAA GGT GCT TCG AAG GAT CTT TTC	192
	Pro Ala Pro Leu Phe Lys Asn Leu Lys Gly Ala Ser Lys Asp Leu Phe	
	50 55 60	
40	AGC ATT TTA GGT TGC CCA GCC GGT TTG AGA AGT AAG GAG AAA GGA GAT	240
	Ser Ile Leu Gly Cys Pro Ala Gly Leu Arg Ser Lys Glu Lys Gly Asp	
	65 70 75 80	
45	CAT GGT AGA ATT GCC CAT CAT CTG GGG CTC GAC CCA AAA ACA ACT ATC	288
	His Gly Arg Ile Ala His His Leu Gly Leu Asp Pro Lys Thr Thr Ile	
	85 90 95	
50	AAG GAA ATC ATA GAT TAT TTG CTG GAG TGT AAG GAG AAG GAA CCT CTC	336
	Lys Glu Ile Ile Asp Tyr Leu Leu Glu Cys Lys Glu Lys Glu Pro Leu	
	100 105 110	
55	CCC CCA ATC ACT GTT CCT GTG TCA TCT GCA CCT TGT AAA ACA CAT ATA	384

	Pro Pro Ile Thr Val Pro Val Ser Ser Ala Pro Cys Lys Thr His Ile	
	115 120 125	
5	CTT TCT GAA GAA AAA ATA CAT CTA CAA AGC CTG CCA ACA CCA TAT CTA	432
	Leu Ser Glu Glu Lys Ile His Leu Gln Ser Leu Pro Thr Pro Tyr Leu	
	130 135 140	
10	CAT GTT TCA GAC GGT GGC AAG TAC TTA CAA ACG TAC GGA ATG TGG ATT	480
	His Val Ser Asp Gly Gly Lys Tyr Leu Gln Thr Tyr Gly Met Trp Ile	
	145 150 155 160	
15	CTT CAA ACT CCA GAT AAA AAA TGG ACT AAT TGG TCA ATT GCT AGA GGT	528
	Leu Gln Thr Pro Asp Lys Lys Trp Thr Asn Trp Ser Ile Ala Arg Gly	
	165 170 175	
20	ATG GTT GTA GAT GAC AAG CAT ATC ACT GGT CTG GTA ATT AAA CCA CAA	576
	Met Val Val Asp Asp Lys His Ile Thr Gly Leu Val Ile Lys Pro Gln	
	180 185 190	
25	CAT ATT AGA CAA ATT GCT GAC TCT TGG GCA GCA ATT GGA AAA GCA AAT	624
	His Ile Arg Gln Ile Ala Asp Ser Trp Ala Ala Ile Gly Lys Ala Asn	
	195 200 205	
30	GAA ATT CCT TTC GCG TTA TGT TTT GGC GTT CCC CCA GCA GCT AFT TTA	672
	Glu Ile Pro Phe Ala Leu Cys Phe Gly Val Pro Pro Ala Ala Ile Leu	
	210 215 220	
35	GTT AGT TCC ATG CCA ATT CCT GAA GGT GTT TCT GAA TCG GAT TAT GTT	720
	Val Ser Ser Met Pro Ile Pro Glu Gly Val Ser Glu Ser Asp Tyr Val	
	225 230 235 240	
40	GGC GCA ATC TTG GGT GAG TCG GTT CCA GTA GTA AAA TGT GAG ACC AAC	768
	Gly Ala Ile Leu Gly Glu Ser Val Pro Val Val Lys Cys Glu Thr Asn	
	245 250 255	
45	GAT TTA ATG GTT CCT GCA ACG AGT GAG ATG GTA TTT GAG GGT ACT TTG	816
	Asp Leu Met Val Pro Ala Thr Ser Glu Met Val Phe Glu Gly Thr Leu	
	260 265 270	
50	TCC TTA ACA GAT ACA CAT CTG GAA GGC CCA TTT GGT GAG ATG CAT GGA	864
	Ser Leu Thr Asp Thr His Leu Glu Gly Pro Phe Gly Glu Met His Gly	
	275 280 285	
55	TAT GTT TTC AAA AGC CAA GGT CAT CCT TGT CCA TTG TAC ACT GTC AAG	912
	Tyr Val Phe Lys Ser Gln Gly His Pro Cys Pro Leu Tyr Thr Val Lys	
	290 295 300	
55	GCT ATG AGT TAC AGA GAC AAT GCT ATT CTA CCT GTT TCG AAC CCC GGT	960

5

10

15

20

25

3

3

4

4

4

Trp Lys Arg Tyr Gly Tyr Lys
500

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 2:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

- (A) LENGTH: 3930
- (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
- (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
- (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(ii) MOLECULE TYPE: Genomic DNA

(vi) ORIGINAL SOURCE:

- (A) ORGANISM: *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*
- (B) STRAIN: YSA7

(ix) FEATURE:

- (A) NAME/KEY: CDS
- (B) LOCATION: 532 to 2043
- (C) IDENTIFICATION METHOD: E

(ix) FEATURE:

- (A) NAME/KEY: cleavage-site
- (B) LOCATION: 1 to 6, 3923 to 3930
- (C) IDENTIFICATION METHOD: S
- (D) OTHER INFORMATION: BamHI cleavage-site

(ix) FEATURE:

- (A) NAME/KEY: cleavage-site
- (B) LOCATION: 656 to 661
- (C) IDENTIFICATION METHOD: S
- (D) OTHER INFORMATION: StuI cleavage-site

(ix) FEATURE:

- (A) NAME/KEY: cleavage-site

(B)LOCATION: 1527 to 1732

(C)IDENTIFICATION METHOD: S

(D)OTHERINFORMATION: SpeI cleavage-site

(ix)FEATURE:

(A)NAME/KEY: cleavage-site

(B)LOCATION: 3555 to 3600

(C)IDENTIFICATION METHOD: S

(D)OTHERINFORMATION: SalI cleavage-site

(xi)SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 2

	GGATCCTAGA CTGCTTTGGC ATCCACGCTG ACACTTTTCC TCGTTGGGAA GGAATAAAAA	60
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	GTTACTTGCT AAAATCTTTT TATATTTCTT TTAGCCCCGA CAGAACTTGT TGCAAATGAA	180
	TACAAACCGT GAACTTCCCG ATATCATTCT AATTGAACCC AGATATTTAC ACATGTAATT	240
25	CTTACTCATT TTCAATGTCA GCTTAAATAT CGTCTAAAAC AATATTTTAC TAGATACGCA	300
	GTTCAATCTT CGCGCATATT TTCACGAAAG TCCAAATTGC GTACGTAGTT TTATGTCAAA	360
	GTGACCGCCC TTGTAGCGTA CTTTTTCCTA TAAGACAAGC TCGTGATATC AGGAATATAT	420
	CAGGAATGTA AACGAATACC GCATATCTTT TTGATTTTTT TCCTCTGAGT TATTCTATTC	480
30	TTGACATTAT TACATCACCA ATTCAAAAGA ATTGTCAATT TATATATTTA AATGAGGAAG	540
	CTAAATCCAG CTTTGAATTT TAGAGACTTT ATCCAGGTCT TAAAAGATGA AGATGACTTA	600
	ATCGAAATTA CCGAAGAGAT TGATCCAAAT CTCGAAGTAG GTGCAATTAT GAGGAAGGCC	660
35	TATGAATCCC ACTTACCAGC CCCGTTATTT AAAAATCTCA AAGGTGCTTC GAAGGATCTT	720
	TTCAGCATTT TAGGTTGCCC AGCCGGTTTG AGAAGTAAGG AGAAAGGAGA TCATGGTAGA	780
	ATTGCCCATC ATCTGGGGCT CGACCCAAAA ACAACTATCA AGGAAATCAT AGATTATTTG	840
	CTGGAGTGTA AGGAGAAGGA ACCTCTCCCC CCAATCACTG TTCCTGTGTC ATCTGCACCT	900
40	TGTA AACAC ATATACTTTC TGAAGAAAAA ATACATCTAC AAAGCCTGCC AACACCATAT	960
	CTACATGTTT CAGACGGTGG CAAGTACTTA CAAACGTACG GAATGTGGAT TCTTCAAAT	1020
	CCAGATAAAA AATGGACTAA TTGGTCAATT GCTAGAGGTA TGGTTGTAGA TGACAAGCAT	1080
45	ATCACTGGTC TGGTAATTAA ACCACAACAT ATTAGACAAA TTGCTGACTC TTGGGCAGCA	1140
	ATTGGAAAAG CAAATGAAAT TCCTTTCGCG TTATGTTTTG GCGTTCCCCC AGCAGCTATT	1200
	TTAGTTAGTT CCATGCCAAT TCCTGAAGGT GTTTCTGAAT CGGATTATGT TGGCGCAATC	1260
	TTGGGTGAGT CGGTTCCAGT AGTAAAATGT GAGACCAACG ATTTAATGGT TCCTGCAACG	1320
50	AGTGAGATGG TATTTGAGGG TACTTTGTCC TTAACAGATA CACATCTGGA AGGCCCCATT	1380
	GGTGAGATGC ATGGATATGT TTTCAAAGC CAAGGTCATC CTTGTCCATT GTACACTGTC	1440

	AAGGCTATGA GTTACAGAGA CAATGCTATT CTACCTGTTT CGAACCCCGG TCTTTGTACG	1500
5	GATGAGACAC ATACCTTGAT TGGTTCATA GTGGCTACTG AGGCCAAGGA GCTGGCTATT	1560
	GAATCTGGCT TGCCAATTCT GGATGCCCTT ATGCCTTATG AGGCTCAGGC TCTTTGGCTT	1620
	ATCTTAAAGG TGGATTTGAA AGGGCTGCAA GCATTGAAGA CAACGCCTGA AGAATTTTGT	1680
10	AAGAAGGTAG GTGATATTTA CTTTAGGACA AAAGTTGGTT TTATAGTCCA TGAATAATT	1740
	TTGGTGGCAG ATGATATCGA CATATTTAAC TTCAAAGAAG TCATCTGGGC CTACGTTACA	1800
	AGACATACAC CTGTTGCAGA TCAGATGGCT TTTGATGATG TCACTTCTTT TCCTTTGGCT	1860
	CCCTTTGTTT CGCAGTCATC CAGAAGTAAG ACTATGAAAG GTGGAAAGTG CGTTACTAAT	1920
15	TGCATATTTA GACAGCAATA TGAGCGCAGT TTTGACTACA TAACTTGTA TTTTGAAAAAG	1980
	GGATATCCAA AAGGATTAGT TGACAAAGTA AATGAAAATT GGAAAAGGTA CGGATATAAA	2040
	TAATTGCCAT AGACTTTCTA CGGAAGAAAA ACCATATAAT CAGATTTTAA ATAAAATTTT	2100
20	CCGAACTTTT ATACTCCACG GTTTTGGAGT TGTGTTGATT CAGTGACAAG CAGTGCGCCA	2160
	TTAACTAT CCATCTTTTCG TACAAAGTAA AGATAAAGTT ATTTTCCTGA GGTGAGAACC	2220
	GTAATCTTT ATAGACAAGG AGTATTTATA ACTAACTAT TACCTTGTA CTTATGGAAT	2280
	TAATCTTGAC TAATAGGCAG ATGATCAACA GTTATTGATT TTGAGTGAAA GTCCATAAAG	2340
25	TTACAGTATG TAATTACAGT ACGTAATTA GGAATGTCTG TAAATATATG CTCCTTTTTT	2400
	TTTTTCCACT TACTATGATT TTAGTAAAGC ACCATGATGA TGTAGATGCG TAATACTCTA	2460
	TAAATGTAAC ATCGTTAAAG CATTGGTTAT TTTAATTTCA TTCTATAAAC CAATATTTCT	2520
30	GACAGCACAT AAAAAATAAA TGGACTATAT TAACAGCAAA TATCGGTTAA TCTAGGGCAT	2580
	AATTATTTAA CATCAAAAAG AAAGTTGCTA GTTGTCTAG TATTGCTCGG AGTACCTCAA	2640
	ACGGTAAAAA GATAATATTT GTTTCGGCTT TTATCATTGA ATAGCTTAGA AATTCTCTCC	2700
	CTAGCGACCA TTTAAGGAAT GTAGCTAACA AAAATGATTC AAGTATGTTG CTCCTAAGCA	2760
35	GATATGTAAT CTATAAGTTG AATCACTATA TCATTGAAAT ATAGTGGCGA GGGCGTACAT	2820
	AAAATCAAAG GAACTATGCA ATAGACTCAA TTAAATGCCA CATAGCTATT TAAGACTCCA	2880
	AATCTCCAAT ACAATCATTC GTTAAAGATT TTTTGATTTC TGCTGATATC TTTTCTACA	2940
40	GTTCCTTGAG TGCTAGTGA TTGCATAAAA TGACCACAGT ATTTTGTAGTA CTCATGGCCT	3000
	GTATGCAATT GCAAGGAACG GTATTACTTT TACAAAAACC CTGCTTTCCG GCAAGTTCAG	3060
	CTGTCAATTT GTAAGATTTT GAAAATAGTG GAAACAATGG ATTATCAACG AATAGTCTTT	3120
	AAACATAAGT GCTAAAATTC AAAACATCAT TTGATGCGTG CCGTGCAATTT TTTGCTGCTG	3180
45	AATGAACCTT TGGAGATATC TGCCTTCGCC AATGAATATG CATTACCATT AATTGCATAG	3240
	TAACCGTATA CATGAAAATG GAAATAATGA ACTGATTATT AAAAATAGCT AATGCAGGTG	3300
	GGATTTGAGA CATTGTGGTT ATCCTGTCAG CCTGTATTTT GCGCTTTAAG GTATTTCTATA	3360
50	AAAGTTAGAA TAAAATTTAA AAGTTCCATT CTATGAACT GTAATTATAG GTATATACTA	3420
	TCATCTACCA ATCTTACCCA TGTATAGTTC TAATATTTAA GACAGAGTAG GTAAAAAATA	3480
	AAATGGTAAT CAAAACGTGA TCGCTTATAT TCGGTATGGA CAAGCTTTGA ATATCCCTA	3540
55	GAAAATGCAA TAGTATGTCA TAATGAAAGA AGATTGTAAT ACAATGCTTG GAATGTCGAC	3600

CGGCAGAAAC CCGTGTACA TGGCCTTATT CAACGTGACG TTGTGATATA TGTAGAACAT 3660
 GCTTTAGATG AGGCGGTATT TGA CTGTAGC ATCTTCTAAA ATGTGCTGAT ATTGTAAAT 3720
 5 CTCAATCAAA CTGAGAGAGT ATGAGAGACT GAAAAAGTGG GATTCTGCCT GTGGTGCTAA 3780
 TATCCTTAAA ATGCTAAACT GAAAGAAGTA ATATAATCAT ATATATTGAT CATGTATCAT 3840
 ACAAAGATG CATGTATTTT AGTAATATTA ACTGCTACTA TGATGTAGTA GACGATCGAT 3900
 10 AATCGAATCT TGGCGTATAT TCTAGGATCC 3930

Claims

1. A protein which is selected from the group consisting of:

- (a) a protein having the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1; and
 (b) a protein having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity and having an amino acid sequence wherein one or more amino acid residues are deleted, substituted or added in the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1.

2. A gene which encodes the protein according to Claim 1.

3. A recombinant vector which comprises the gene according to Claim 2.

4. A transformant which carries the recombinant vector according to Claim 3.

5. A yeast which carries the recombinant vector according to Claim 3.

6. A process for producing 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid, which comprises bringing ferulic acid into contact with an enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from the transformant according to Claim 4 in an aqueous medium to form 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid in the aqueous medium, and recovering 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin, or vanillic acid therefrom.

7. The process according to Claim 6, wherein said enzyme source is the protein according to Claim 1, or a culture, cells or treated cells of the transformant according to Claim 4.

8. A process for producing a distilled liquor, which comprises adding to moromi an enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from the transformant according to Claim 4.

9. The process according to Claim 8, wherein said enzyme source is the protein according to Claim 1, or a culture, cells or treated cells of the transformant according to Claim 4.

10. A process for producing a distilled liquor, which is characterized in that a yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity is used.

11. The process according to Claim 10, wherein said yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity is a yeast which carries a recombinant vector comprising a gene encoding ferulic acid decarboxylase.

12. The process according to Claim 10, wherein said yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity is the yeast according to Claim 5.

13. A distilled liquor obtainable by a process which comprises adding to moromi an enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from the transformant carrying the recombinant vector which comprises the gene encoding the protein which is selected from the group consisting of:

- (a) a protein having the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1; and
(b) a protein having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity and having an amino acid sequence wherein one or more amino acid residues are deleted, substituted or added in the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1.

14. A distilled liquor obtainable by a process which is characterized in that a yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity is used.

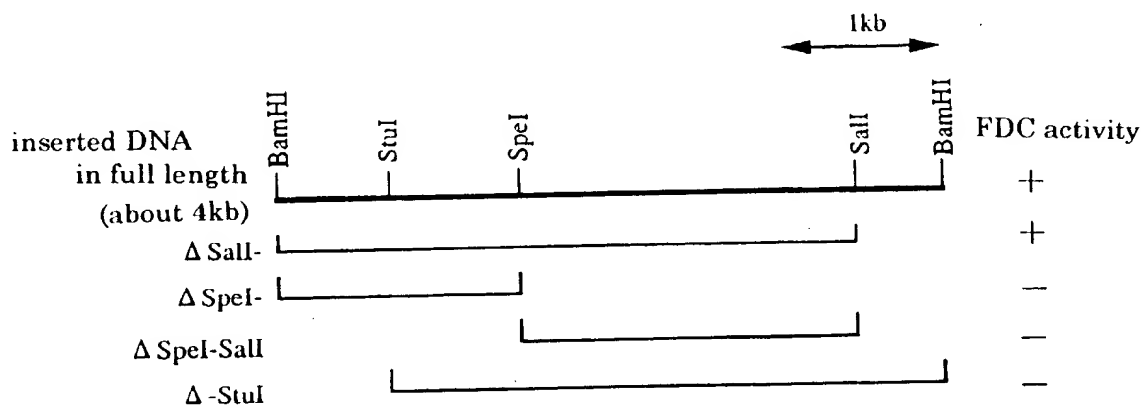
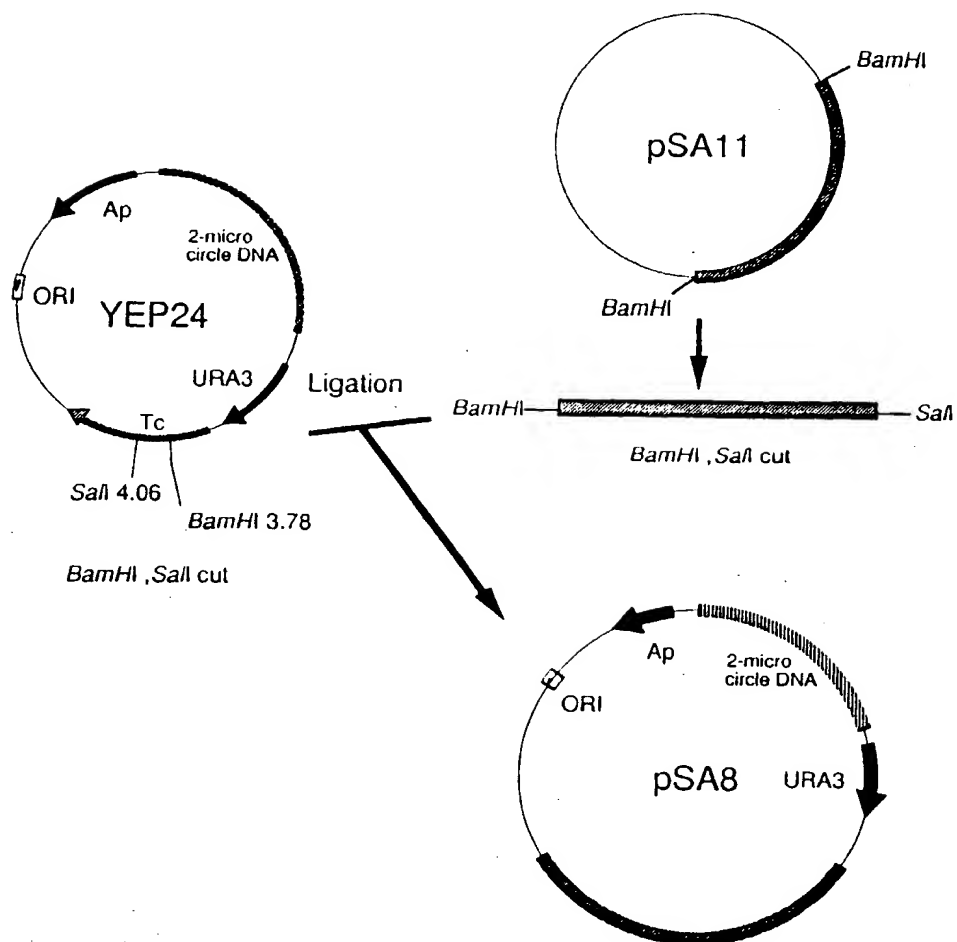
Fig. 1

Fig. 2



(19)



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(54) **Ferulic acid decarboxylase**

(57) The present invention relates to a protein having the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1, or a protein having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity and having an amino acid sequence wherein one or more amino acid residues are deleted, substituted or added in the amino acid sequence represented by SEQ ID NO: 1; a gene encoding said protein; a recombinant

vector comprising said gene; a transformant carrying said recombinant vector; a process for producing 4-vinylguaiacol, vanillin or vanillic acid, or a distilled liquor, wherein an enzyme source having ferulic acid decarboxylase activity which is derived from said transformant is used; and a process for producing a distilled liquor, wherein yeast having an enhanced ferulic acid decarboxylase activity is used.

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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

EP 98 30 0789

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.CI.6)
D,X	ZAGO ET AL.: "Cloning, Sequencing, and Expression in Escherichia coli of the Bacillus pumilus Gene for Ferulic Acid Decarboxylase" APPLIED AND ENVIRONMENTAL MICROBIOLOGY, vol. 61, no. 12, December 1995 (1995-12), page 44844486 XP002119941 * page 4485; figure 2 * * page 4484, column 2, line 5 - line 12 *	1-4	C12N15/60 C12N9/88 C12P7/24 C12G3/06 C12N1/19
D,X	Database Emfun. Saccharomyces cerevisiae chromosome IV lambda 3073 and flanking region extending into right telomere. 22-12-1995. SEQ. ID. No. SC43834. XP002120075 *See Nts 2361-3872 and translation*	1,2	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.CI.6)
			C12N C12P
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search		Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE		25 October 1999	Mata Vicente, T.
<p>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</p> <p>X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document</p> <p>T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p>			

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